

**SUMMARY REPORT OF THE WORLD UNION OF CATHOLIC WOMEN'S  
ORGANISATIONS CONCERNING SUGGESTED PASTORAL ACTIONS  
RELATIVE TO PARAGRAPH 30 OF *INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS* FOR  
THE 2015 SYNOD ON THE FAMILY**

The World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations, a public international association of the faithful, founded in 1910 and at present comprised of over one hundred member organizations from every continent, is honoured to participate in the provision of reflections and suggested pastoral actions concerning Paragraph 30 of *Instrumentum Laboris* in light of the 2015 Synod on the Family. The countries that responded, reflecting all regions of our globe, include:

Argentina  
Australia  
Cameroon  
Congo  
Cuba  
Fiji  
France  
Gabon  
Hungary  
Italy  
Ivory Coast  
New Zealand  
Senegal  
Spain  
Tonga  
USA  
Venezuela  
Zambia

Nearly all responses requested that the Church recognize the particular innate characteristics of women that make them valuable and primary transmitters of the faith to the family and to the community. It is recognized that women and men have skills and abilities that are unique to each gender that result from physiological differences and that are shaped by social expectations and opportunities. It is acknowledged that women have natural skills in organization and in nurturing that can be of great value to our Church, often referred to as Mother Church. This close connection needs to be fostered and the following suggestions are made to enable our Church to access the talents, skills, and abilities of women in an enhanced and optimal way as we respond to

the rapidly changing society in which we live while retaining the core and immutable values and teachings of our Catholic faith.

### **A. Enhance the Service of Women in All Areas of the Church Not Reserved to the Sacramental Privilege of Priests**

“Women are at the service of life” - France

1. Place skilled women (and men) in lieu of priests in administrative, teaching, and other positions that do not involve duties reserved to priests.
2. To that end, promote the formation of women at the parish, diocesan, national, and international levels and incorporate these well-trained and educated women into all levels of the Church.
3. Parish Level: Make trained women leaders and co-workers with priests for pastoral ministries such as Rite of Initiation and Wedding sacrament preparation, advising families in difficulty, dating issues and working with youth, and working with the bereaved. Access professional women to advise the pastor in areas of finance, legal matters, and medical issues. Do not relegate women who have experience in organizing and leadership to being the secretary just because they are women and this is how it has always been. It is time for a cultural change in the Church and a full incorporation of women into those areas for which they have a talent and ability.
4. Diocesan Level: Offer properly qualified women opportunities to participate in various offices of the Church such as being members of ecclesiastical courts, particularly for cases concerning issues for women and children.
5. National Level: Provide equal opportunities for women to lead and teach at Catholic universities. Enhance access and listen to the voice of women at the Episcopal Conferences. Promote national Catholic women’s organisations.
6. International Level: Support the cooperation of Catholic NGO’s as they work in the international fora to promote the proper place of women and the family. Promote international Catholic women’s organisations.
7. In summary: Women have historically been the transmitters of faith in the family and in the community in their words and actions. Draw on this and access qualified women to lead ministries and to teach at the parish level, to lead offices at the diocesan level, to lead and teach in Catholic universities and to advise the Episcopal Conference with a voice equal to that of men at all levels.

## **B. Permit Women an Equal Voice in Decision Making in the Church**

“There is an awareness of the need for cultural change in the Church to allow an appreciation of the role of women, including decision-making.” - Argentina

1. The Church should permit women to participate equally with men in decision-making, in the development of pastoral plans, preparation of documents, etc.
2. Women should be consulted and involved in decision-making at all levels in the Church
3. In summary: The Church must recognize that women have abilities and sensitivities that differ from men and by calling on both sexes for decision-making, the Church would then have a naturally balanced resource for reaching opinions and decisions.

## **C. Catholic Women's Groups**

“Do not ignore the long established national Catholic women's organizations but give them prominence and an active role in diocesan, national, and international meetings and works. These women have long experience in running meetings and in organizing outreach to others domestically and internationally. Be aware of their activities and include them” - USA

1. Encourage participation in Catholic women's organisations.
2. Include these organisations in parish, diocesan, national, and international events. Give Catholic women's organisations the same importance and prominence as that accorded to Catholic men's organisations. This is not the case at present in our Church.

## **D. Provision of Instruction for Women**

“Only a strong and comprehensive training of committed Christians will open the way to women of this century.” –Spain

1. Support programs of formation in our faith and make them available to all interested women. This could be done at the parish or diocesan level and/or could be offered through established national Catholic women's organisations.
2. Facilitate the provision of programs that teach proper Catholic family values. These could include didactic instruction at the parish, programs whereby good Catholic families temporarily move to remote areas to model Catholic family life for the persons living there, programs that assist young mothers to know how to care for their children physically and spiritually. These family programs should provide instruction in the role of the mother and discuss her complementarity with her husband in the family structure.

3. Offer courses in Theology of the Body to women and to youth in an accessible manner (teaching at the parish, videos for self-teaching).
4. Promote Natural Family Planning as part of the preparation for engaged couples. Inform women of the harm done by artificial contraception to their bodies and to the environment. Promote the Year of Mercy in terms of forgiveness for abortion. Provide information to priests at deanery meetings of the above and of the dangers of surrogacy (risk of death from super-ovulant drugs, infertility or cancer) and the emotional and psychological harm experienced by women due to abortion or surrogacy. Sensitize our clergy to the concerns and needs of women.
5. Offer workshops at the diocesan and parish level that address problems women face (violence, migrants, single parents, equality with husband in the family, self esteem and motivating women, etc.). Use film documentaries and discussions at these workshops that should be open to all (not always exclusively for Catholic women). Offer training programs to provide dignity and care for victims of domestic violence.
6. Consider declaration of an annual world-wide Week for Women in the Church when courses in formation could be offered at the parish and/or diocesan level.

#### **E. Provision of Instruction with Regard to and Including Women**

“Many times we have difficulties with parish priests who are worried about the growing involvement of women.” –Hungary

1. There are still problems with priests who resist inclusion of women in the decision making process of the parish. A remedy for this would be to have women as a part of the process of formation for seminarians so the men can learn to relate to, value, and work with women without reservation or hesitation.
2. Ensure that all in the Church value the particular innate characteristics of women that make them valuable transmitters of the faith to the family and the community. To ensure this respect for the ability of women in parishes, provide classes and homilies that highlight the value and contributions of women to our faith and to evangelization efforts.
3. The Church teaches that life at all stages is a gift that should be respected and nurtured. Women understand this instinctively and would be of great help in this area in assisting pastors in teaching this. The Church needs to be familiar with and support women at all stages and states of life: girls, adolescents, young women, middle aged women, elderly women, single, married, widowed, divorced, women who are single parents, women in a traditional family, and women who are grandparents. Women themselves would be a most valuable resource for the Church to access to understand and support to pastors who would teach respect for women at all life stages.

4. In summary: Properly trained women could lead and/or assist the clergy in various ministries and offices and could be excellent representatives of our Church to Society. This can occur if the clergy would improve their knowledge of women and appreciate the contributions women can make to the Church and to Society.

#### **F. The Perceived Role of Women in the Church and Society**

“Are the stereotype roles of women in the Church any different from the secular world? How much do women contribute to or penetrate decision making in the Church?” – Zambia

1. Women are exploited and subject to violence due to ignorance, prejudice, cultural practice, and economic difficulty. These root causes must be addressed concurrent with Church emphasis on the value of women.

2. The Church should continue to provide care for women and children who are victimized in keeping with the Gospel message.

3. The rapid expansion of technology requires that the Church promote ethical reflection and integral human ecology.

-This reflection should be provided at the parish level by professionally well trained persons.

-This reflection should include an examination of the damaging effect of pornography on women and family life. The Church should encourage organisations that assist others in overcoming the addiction of pornography and that assist those who have exited the porn industry to rebuild their lives.

4. Offer programs and assistance to marginalized women to better themselves through formal education and through self-help groups. This can be done through established Church entities such as Catholic Charities as well as through established national Catholic women’s organisations.

5. Some African responses indicated that the place of women in society sorely needs assistance due to cultural practice in a patriarchal society, political practice whereby women are marginalized and seen as commodities rather than as persons, and economic practice whereby poor families push their young female children into prostitution to provide income for the family. The role of women needs to be elevated and promoted in Society and in the Church in order to enable women to fulfill the Gospel message. Illiteracy in women must be combated through promotion of education for female as well as male children. Micro-finance should be extended to women who are usually the backbone of development in the continent. Husbands must be held to a standard of love and instructed to cherish their wives and to treat them with

dignity and equality in the family. It was noted that there are men who are held in esteem by the Church who treat their wives violently. This makes it appear that the Church condones such treatment of women though the opposite is most certainly the case. This needs to be addressed quickly by the Church. The Church could also play a role in formal education, particularly at the secondary level for females, and in facilitating micro-finance operations to aid women. The Church should also speak out against laws and practices that favor men over women and she should stand against political corruption that prevents the poor, often women, from improving their status.

6. In areas beset by war, it is a well known fact that women and children suffer the most. The same situation is true for those in refugee status. The Church should continue to offer assistance through a) Catholic relief agencies and b) proclaiming the Pope's call to prayer for persons suffering from war and for those in refugee situations. In addition, opening of homes and social assistance agencies for refugees has also been requested by the Pope and this should be encouraged.

7. In some countries, contemporary culture has reduced a woman's identity to economic and social dimensions without concern for her personal or family development. The Church could assist in overcoming this unfortunate occurrence by workshops and sermons reaffirming the dignity, value and equal status of women with men and then go beyond words to incorporate women into Church affairs at every level save those reserved for the priest. There is an old saying that "actions speak louder than words."

*-Don't wait for Society to dictate the status of women; the Church should establish a standard of dignity and respect for women and their talents and demonstrate commitment to that standard by expanding the role of women in the Church to those positions for which women are qualified..*

-It would be good for the Church to provide support in the form of workshops and sermons to educate and encourage women who are often wife or a single parent, mother, grandmother, care for one or more elderly relatives, and work outside the home. Proper care and support of elderly women should also be addressed.

8. In most developed countries, in the traditional family, the roles of the husband and wife are different and complementary. The Church should recognize this model and incorporate the contribution of women more fully into the Church.

9. Importantly, the Church hierarchy must recall the role of Mary, Mother of God, and understand that the strength, wisdom, faith, and motherly devotion she exhibited are hallmarks of all women. These characteristics should be recognized, honored, and utilized by the Church. Incorporating a standard prayer to the Blessed Mother in the Mass, perhaps during the Prayer of the Faithful, should be considered and would

provide an opportunity for all to consider the important role women play in the family and in our Church.

In summary: Women have innate talents, abilities, and characteristics that differ from those of men. Our natural skills in organizing and nurturing, so easily seen in the home, need to be recognized and incorporated in our Church in conjunction with the skills that men possess so that our Church and our world benefit from the best our Creator gave us. Our Church needs to continue to reach out to the poor and suffering of the world, to those single women trying their best to head families, to those who suffer violence and illiteracy and are considered less than men. The Church needs to lead the way in establishing a standard of respect and appreciation for women and their gifts through all stages of a woman's life. It would be ideal to have both men and women work together in the Church equally as both sexes view and approach issues in different but complementary ways, both of which are needed. Our Church has a rich resource in its women, many of them well educated and trained, and in the national and international organizations of these Catholic women that provide experience and programs that address many of the needs of our society. Do not be afraid or bound by tradition to let women assume roles previously ascribed to men alone in all areas save those reserved to the priesthood. This is a process that is evolving but women expect this to accelerate with the support of Pope Francis. Let us hope that it leads to a world that is guided to Our Lord through the heart and mind of His Blessed Mother, the role model for all Catholic women.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our input on Paragraph 30. We hope that our contribution will facilitate discussion concerning the role of women in our Church. We assure you of our prayers for the success of the Synod. May Mary, Queen of Peace, Patroness of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations, ask her divine Son to bless all who participate in this work to enable our Church to promote and sustain the family.